

UNDERSTANDING THE STRUGGLES AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

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In 2014, over 60,000 children from Central American countries immigrated to the United States alone, without adult supervision. These children are referred to as Unaccompanied Minors (UAM). There are many reasons why they emigrate from their countries to the United States, including: 1) reunify with family, 2) escape abuse, 3) escape violence and persecution, and/or 4) are brought by human trafficking rings.

The UAM population faces many problems and obstacles. They have to process the possible trauma experienced in their home countries, and also the current trauma of their migrant journey, the detainment while awaiting placement, and the struggle of placement with unknown caregivers. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) understands the importance of addressing childhood trauma. On Thursday, March 26, 2015, LACDMH conducted training for mental health providers working with the UAM population.



The training was at St. Anne's and hosted by Children's System of Care Administration, Bryan Mershon, Ph.D., Deputy Director.

LACDMH Director Marvin Southard, DSW, welcomed the 95 participants and discussed how trauma affects child development and family relationships. The training was presented by David Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D., Professor of Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Dr. Hayes-Bautista assisted training participants to understand the multi-faceted needs and characteristics of the UAM population. A panel of previously Unaccompanied Minors (now adults) also spoke during the training and shed light into the ramifications of immigrating alone, such as family dynamic issues. The panel members helped mental health providers comprehend what they can do to assist this vulnerable group of children.



Training participants received information about the topic, including a Resource Directory created by Children's System of Care, specifically for the UAM population. In addition to the UAM training, LACDMH has also created a solicitation to identify organizations which may be qualified to provide mental health services to the UAM population. The expectation is that providing early intervention services to the UAM population will mitigate the costly, negative, long-term outcomes associated with untreated trauma in the future.